

God's Mightiest Work

(John. 6:22-35)

(Images referenced during sermon are at the bottom of the document)

Grace, mercy, and peace be yours from God, our Father, and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

I talked with Pastor Eden for a bit as we were making plans for this Sunday, and he told me that Our Redeemer typically has communion every Sunday, which is a wonderful tradition that is sadly interrupted to accommodate me filling in this Sunday. For good reason I cannot be the celebrant for the Lord's Supper until I am ordained. This was all fine and good until I read the assigned readings for this Sunday. We have God raining Holy bread on the Israelites, and Jesus declaring himself to be the Bread of life! Oh my, what a Sunday to skip the Sacrament! Hopefully, this message will have you yearn for the Lord's feast with a greater fervor next week.

Well, in addition to bread, today's gospel reading has to do with works as well, and what God's work looks like. So now I ask you: what do you consider a mighty work? A great achievement? A work so amazing it leaves you standing in awe? Well, on the internet, the source of all of man's true knowledge, there is a great debate raging on what the mightiest works of mankind are.

One argument cites the advancements of space travel. Just recently, midway through July, the New Horizons Probe just did its flyby of Pluto, the farthest planet-ish thing in our solar system over 3 billion miles away. Technically, the proper designation for Pluto is "Dwarf-planet", but that should not side tract from the beauty we are now seeing of a part of God's creation that we previously were blind to. This is also significant, because New Horizons just finished a quest to examine every planet in our solar system that started half a century ago when Mariner 2 launched in August 1962 to examine Venus for the first time.

We now have the first ever full color pictures of Pluto and one commenter exclaimed, "Pluto is an amazing little world, and this high-res, enhanced-color image is

the latest awe-inspiring portrait of it.” In your bulletin’s insert is the picture the scientific world has been going gaga over. Never before have people been able to see the distant orb so clearly. The majesty of God’s creation is beautiful, and another glimpse of it through a new angle is always welcome. Man’s quests into space, including the famous lunar landing are amazing accomplishments to be sure, but are they the mightiest?

I read one convincing argument that humanity’s advances in communication are its greatest achievements. From the development of written language to the printing press and the internet, the way we communicate has changed dramatically throughout history. Billions of people surf the web. Of the world’s 7.1 billion people, an estimated 2.4 billion people go online today. That’s 37.7 percent of the world’s total population. About six out of seven people across the globe have internet access. Approximately 70 percent of internet users surf the web every day. Email, social networks, video streaming services—all this has changed the way people live. Information is literally at my fingertips all the time. I can ask my phone for the solution to almost any problem.

Another achievement many talked about was humanity’s advancements in architecture, more specifically how high we can make a thing. When I lived in Chicago we used to call the Sears Tower, well technically now it’s the Willis Tower, “the big one,” but on the world stage the humble Chicago tower does not even compare. Look at the other image I have in your bulletins. The Willis Tower is the one on the right. The Burj Khalifa in Saudi Arabia stands at over 2700 feet and is pictured to the left. It is amazing how much taller it stands over the world’s former number one. It truly stands as an achievement to human engineering prowess.

How mighty are these works? How long will their impact last? In today’s Gospel reading Jesus talks about things that last for eternity, and things that perish, are only temporary. To understand the events of today’s gospel we have to understand the events that preceded it. The events in sequence are the feeding of the 5,000, Jesus walking on water, healings on the shore, and now we have the people he fed catching up to him.

I was glad to see on Our Redeemer’s website that Pastor Eden did preach on the feeding of the 5,000 a couple of weeks ago. He covered its importance well. Pastor Eden mentioned that the Spiritual nourishment was more important than the physical. Jesus in today’s reading underscores that point as well.

So the people catch up the Jesus and demand more food. Isn't that indicative of people in general? He gave me food, I want more! The people followed Jesus because the bread they ate was only temporary, it did not last forever.

Jesus tells the person to "stop working for the bread that perishes," which is the bread that spoils. The people respond the way that our sinful condition demands. They ask how do we accomplish the works of God, Just like the people who built the Tower of Babel in ancient times. The sinful pride of man assumes that people like you and I can perform mighty works like only God can.

Man can fly in space. Man can build tall towers, but can man do the work of God? Can man produce something that is eternal?

Jesus' answer pierces through the pride of sinful man. He says, "The work of God is this, that you may come to believe in the man God has sent." The mightiest work is not a tower, not a picture of a rock, but is the gift of faith. God's work is that he inspires faith in his son, Jesus Christ, faith in the work that Christ has accomplished for us on the cross.

God creates this faith, though the means of Word and water at Baptism, and in today's reading Jesus shares how to strengthen and sustain that faith. To partake in the bread that comes from heaven. That is the bread that we as Christians partake in communion. See, I could not help but talk about communion! The faith that God ignites and maintains is his mightiest work.

Why is this work so mighty? It is because it is eternal. At the end of the ages, will our accomplishments still stand? Will the internet matter? Will our towers last for all ages? Will the works the world believes are mighty continue into all time? No. What will? You and me. We are sealed into an eternal destiny by God who has placed us into an eternal relationship with his Son through faith. At the end of ages we will stand in the presence of the Father, never hungry, and never thirsty. Not our towers, but us.

Natalie, my wife who sadly couldn't be here this evening/morning, has had the pleasure of serving at Camp Wartburg in Southern Illinois as counsellor in the past. The first week of every summer is called "Shepherding Sheep" or more casually, "handi-camp." The camp plays host to dozens of special needs, and physically and mentally handicapped campers of all ages who get to enjoy a couple of days away from their

homes. At the end of their stay, they all gather for a talent show where everyone has the opportunity to participate in an act of their choosing. Natalie told me that each year, without fail, there is always a group of campers who come together and sing loud and proud, “Jesus loves me, this I know for the Bible tells me so.”

Brothers and Sisters in Christ, that is the mightiest work of God that extends all the way to eternity. The Burj Khalifka will fall, but the soul of anyone who cries “Jesus loves me” either aloud or in his or her heart will stand forever. God sent his Son into the world to live, die, and raise for the world’s sins. That was the beginning of God’s mightiest work. The work is completed in you, in your hearts, and in your minds into eternity. Amen.

May the peace that surpasses all understanding guard our hearts and our minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Pluto as captured by New Horizon’s (below) and a comparison of the Willis Tower and the Burj Khalifka (to the right).

